

January 18, 2000 Regional Trails Forum Meeting Summary

February 7, 2000

Introduction

On January 18, 2000, the first Regional Trails Forum was held to introduce the Regional Off-Street System Plan (ROSS). Nearly 30 attended the meeting, which was hosted by the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) and featured presentations by MAG, Maricopa County Planning and Development Department, and the Flood Control District of Maricopa County. The presentations made by the agencies were followed with hearty discussion of visions for off-street travel in the region, issues and needs to consider in doing the plan, and types of corridors to identify. Participants were given opportunity to voice their concerns, and members of the consultant team facilitated the discussion and documented these concerns for incorporation into the ROSS plan.

The Regional Trails Forum was originally initiated as a way to obtain input on the ROSS plan. The Forum increased in scope to incorporate planning efforts of other agencies addressing the issues of pathway development, trails, open space and transportation. With increased interest among several government agencies, private sector organizations, elected officials and members of the public in these issues, the creation of the Regional Trails Forum became a way to encourage cooperation among numerous players. Providing a forum for discussion and study of regional problems is a key role of MAG. By cooperating and pooling common resources, citizens can get the utmost dollar for every dollar spent on governmental operations.

Overview of Presentations

The meeting began with an introduction from MAG staff to explain the purpose of the Regional Trails Forum. The Forum serves to:

- Provide input to the ROSS plan;
- Provide input to the Maricopa County Eye to the Future 2020 Comprehensive Plan Update, especially the trails and open space elements;
- Encourage connectivity of trails between jurisdictional boundaries; and
- Apprise cities, business interests, community groups and citizens of trail development issues and planning activities of public agencies.

The meeting continued with a presentation by the consultant team. A brief summary of the presentation is provided below.

Project Understanding

The project will be a success if the end result is the improvement of the current system of off-street pathways which will discourage the use of the auto for short trips and encourage the development of a multi-modal transportation system for the MAG Region.



Multi-Modal Understanding

The transportation system must be considered in its entirety as an integrated system including a variety of modes of transportation such as walking and bicycling.

Pathway System Purposes

The pathways systems will be truly multi-use.

- Journey (commuting, journey to school, etc.)
- Lifestyle (healthy living, lack of alternative means etc.)
- Locality (lunchtime walks through the park, weekend horse rides etc.)

Primary Project Goal

The primary project goal is that bicycling and walking become viable alternatives for short trips. This can only be possible if the off-street pathways are properly conceived and constructed.

Key Project Goals

- Identifying and prioritizing off-street pathways that will ensure a true multi-modal transportation system.
- Develop ROSS plan that meets the needs of a wide range of users.
- Improve the efficiency of the overall transportation system.

Key Project Objectives

- Identify corridors using a multi-pronged approach, through data collection, field studies, and stakeholder and public input.
- Prioritize proposed projects.
- Identify and explore funding sources for projects.
- Develop maintenance strategies for the system.

ROSS Multi-Modal Strategies

The correct linkages will lead to a seamless integration of off-street and on-street systems for most potential users. It will be important to optimize the potential usage and benefits of the off-street system by identifying present concentrations of local on-street trips.

Off Street/Street Integration

Land use, both future and present should be considered when integrating path systems. Land use considerations include such things as, density and intensity of use, identification of trip generators and destinations, and compatibility issues. Urban design support will aid the integration of pathways into the existing urban fabric.

Corridors

Pathways will be in corridors, such as: desert “greenbelts”, linear parkways, rights-of-way along canals, transmission line easements, railroad corridors, flood control channels, scenic corridors, utility easements, and others to be identified through the public participation process.

Implementation We will answer the who, what, when, why, where, and how of implementation. Linking projects, people and resources is key to the success of ROSS.

National Standards

National Standards will be utilized in the development of standards for trails. These standards include AASHTO, The Green Book and Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, FHWA, Safety and Locational Criteria for Bicycles and Planning, Design and Maintenance of Pedestrian Facilities.

Project Timeline

The project will take six months to complete. A detailed timeline showing meeting dates and completion dates for each task will be circulated in the near future.

Next, the Maricopa County Planning Department provided an overview of the Maricopa County Eye to the Future 2020 Comprehensive Plan Update. The presentations concluded with the Flood Control District providing some information on current projects which might be able to accommodate pathways for off-street travel.

Participant Comments

The following is a summary of the participant comments from the Forum. While some of the comments relate to a vision for the ROSS, most relate to issues and items to consider when developing a ROSS. In listing the comments below, efforts have been made to state participants ideas as voiced at the Forum.

- Nature should not be lost amongst inevitable growth.
- The system should be truly regional, with seamless linkages, even when crossing political boundaries.
- We should continue to build on the Sun Circle Regional Trail System.
- Plan for trail systems in advance of development to reduce the amount of retrofitting required to make trails work.
- There is a need to plan for a variety of users from the serious cyclists to families and novice bike riders.

- The off-street system should complement the existing and planned on-street system of bike lanes.
- There should be opportunities for loops in the system. For example, a loop could be formed using the Agua Fria, the Central Arizona Project, the McDowell Mountains and the Salt River.
- The Plan that is developed needs to be supported by all municipalities, stakeholders and the public, and builders need to be aware of how plans may impact their developments so they can participate in the development of the system by setting aside appropriate areas.
- The plan should be considered from a regional perspective without competition between municipalities.
- Connectivity to the bus system should be a consideration.
- The plan should be realistic, practical and trails should be useable.
- The Desert Spaces Open Space Plan for Maricopa County should be considered.
- Environmental and open space restoration should be added to the flood control charter.
- The system should be user friendly, visible and accessible so it can be utilized to its full potential. Some kind of promotional campaign will be required.
- Credibility will be added to the plan if it is adopted by the Desert Spaces Task Force.
- Operational systems need to be flexible.
- Land use decisions need to be considered because of the impact they can have on the system both directly, i.e. reserve corridors, and indirectly, i.e. distance to services and employment centers.
- Time should be taken to build consensus among stakeholders, communities and government agencies.
- Maximize intermodal connections.
- Currently there are fragmented trails that should be incorporated into the overall strategy.
- Prepare an inventory of trails.

- Work with existing city trails plans.
- Compile all regional trails maps.
- Develop criteria for evaluating plans and prioritizing trails.
- Identify user expectations and needs. For example, the need for facilities such as water fountains, restrooms, bike racks, etc. Different users sometimes have different needs.
- Preserve as much as possible -- the standard should be to preserve natural environments.
- Link to other counties and consider their plans.
- There should be a model standard developed, which is flexible enough to be used in a variety of circumstances. Examples of standards include right-of-way widths, trail surface, etc.
- Who pays? There is a need to work out potential funding sources and partnerships to ensure that projects proceed on time. Potential funding sources/partners include: developers, federal grants, business interests and tourism. Could a type of adopt a trail program be implemented?
- Need to consider access points, particularly through private property. Identify potential access points and consider landownership.
- Stakeholders identified who should be involved in future Trails Forums include:
 - ☐ Private Landowners
 - ☐ State Land Department
 - ☐ Central Arizona Project (CAP)
 - ☐ Forest Service
 - ☐ The Bureau of Reclamation
 - ☐ Valley Forward
 - ☐ Valley Partnership
 - ☐ Land Trusts
 - ☐ The Mountain Bike Association
 - ☐ Equestrian Groups
 - ☐ Railroads
 - ☐ Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT)
- Language can be important. Sometimes pathways fall under municipal departments that deal with streets, not parks; whereas trails are usually under a parks and recreation department.

- Trails should be accessible on foot or by bicycle. People need to be able to get to the system without driving. Large arterial roads make access difficult.
- Users need to be educated about the rules of the system. Signs are a good method.
- It will be necessary to come up with creative engineering and design solutions to fill in gaps in the system which are usually created by political boundaries, arterial roads, topographic conditions, etc.
- It is important to identify and link origin and destination points to be sure the system is used as much as possible.
- Liability as an issue is overrated since the Recreational Users Liability Act places most of the onus on the individual for safety.
- Planning for the location of public facilities such as libraries, community centers, etc. should consider access to the ROSS.

Any comments regarding issues, opportunities, constraints, goals, objectives or information sources for this project are welcomed and can be e-mailed to ross@rbf.com